

Williamsburg Bird Club
Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Hybrid Zoom & in-person meeting at Williamsburg Regional Library Theater, presided by President
Nancy Barnhart: 6:00 pm

Attendance: 24 in-person and approximately 34 via Zoom

President's Remarks: President Nancy Barnhart welcomed members and guests including Hampton Roads Bird Club, Piedmont Bird Club, Historic Rivers Chapter of Master Naturalists and Middle Peninsula Chapter of Master Naturalists. Nancy encouraged guests to explore WBC's web site which among many things offers photos, articles, past newsletters, bird count records and membership forms. Reminding us of Bill William's February presentation on Craney Island, she noted that the club's archives revealed that our club's very first field trip was to Craney Island in October 1977.

Nancy apologized for any inconvenience caused by the meeting starting as early as 6 pm stating that it was the only option to allow time for Q&A and a short business meeting before the library closes at 8 pm.

Program: Program's Vice President, Patty Maloney, introduced the speaker, Shirley Devan, who delivered the evenings program: *Prothonotary Warblers in James City County and Beyond*.

Shirley Devan has been monitoring Prothonotary Warbler (PROW) nest boxes in our part of Virginia for the last 10 years. Among her many activities, Shirley has been the past president of WBC for 6 years; past president of Historic Rivers Chapter of Master Naturalists which she helped found in 2006; current membership secretary of Virginia Society of Ornithology and current secretary of Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory.

Shirley noted that the long name of these little birds with a brilliant yellow head and chest refers to the bright yellow robes once worn by clerks known as prothonotaries in the Catholic church. She was delighted to report that we have a robust population in our area. PROWs are most numerous in the Southeast, and they nest almost always over standing water, not far from the shoreline or in low lying, easily flooded swamps. They winter in Central and northern South America. It is the only warbler east of the Mississippi River that nests in small natural or artificial cavities. The males arrive a few days before females and establish their territory by placing moss in nest cavities and singing. The female chooses the nest cavity and male she 'likes' and finishes the nest cup with a lining of rootlets, plant down, grasses and bark strips. The eggs are laid one per day for a total of 3-7 eggs, most often five in the first clutch and four in the second clutch. Incubation starts when the last egg is laid and all of them hatch on the same day. Amazingly, the nestlings are in the box for only 10 days. For them to grow and fledge in such an incredibly short time requires being fed by both parents. On day 10, the fledglings either fly or swim to the shoreline. Shirley has witnessed many fledglings drop from the box into the water below and using their wings, breaststroke about six feet to the shore where the parents are waiting and quickly lead them into the understory for protection. The parents continue to feed the nestlings for up to five weeks. A pair of PROWs will normally raise two broods per season.

PROWs have been studied in Virginia since 1987. Gathering data is important because their population has fallen over 30% over the last 50 years primarily due to loss of breeding grounds of forested wetlands and wintering grounds of mangroves. Shirley has a federal and state license to band birds and started banding PROWs on the Northwest River in Chesapeake in 2011. PROWs are also being monitored

at Newport News Reservoir, the Dragon Run in King & Queen and Middlesex Counties and James City County. She stressed that no harm comes to birds that are being caught and banded. Shirley has documented several cases of nest fidelity by recognizing banded adults returning year after year to the same nest box or one nearby. It was estimated that one female had made six round trips to Panama and back to the same nest box in Northwest River Park.

In James City County, along with CVWO President, Brian Taber and other volunteers, she's been monitoring seven bird boxes installed on Powhatan Creek Trail from which a total of 41 nestlings have fledged; eleven bird boxes installed in 2017 on Chickahominy Riverfront Park from which 74 nestlings have fledged; and, with members of the WINGS Bird Club at Ford's Colony, five installed in 2019 in Ford's Colony Nature Trail from which three nestlings have fledged to date.

Banding PROWs in the nest box is risky business that involves climbing ladders in swamplands or balancing in a canoe. Shirley showed us the hand net she uses that has been cobbled together from an 18-inch section of fishing pole to which is attached a 3-inch embroidery hoop on which netting has been hand sewn. She described that catching the female by placing the net over the nest box hole while she is incubating and capturing it when she flies out is relatively easy. But the male usually just sits at the entrance and leans forward to feed the youngsters. Shirley's only hope of catching a male is to employ super stealth mode and just wait for an opportunity! The youngsters are banded when they are about five days old, when their legs are stiff enough to hold the band and feet big enough that the band doesn't slide off. Shirley explained that bird bands are sized according to the weight and size of the bird species. These nestlings and adults receive a tiny band size 0 which will stay on them for the rest of their lives.

Shirley concluded by naming and thanking the volunteers that have helped her in James City County and the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory that is the sponsor for this project as well as other organizations that have provided funding.

For more details about this fascinating project and lovely photos of a really beautiful interesting bird, a YouTube video of Shirley's presentation is available at: <https://youtu.be/Cq2-REPWfxE>

Business Meeting:

Recognition of Cheryl Jacobson's Service: Nancy Barnhart noted that Cheryl was vice president for four years and then, as president, aptly steered our club through the last challenging four years that included dealing with the impact of Covid (which included preparation for hosting the annual 2020 VSO meeting and dealing with the fallout when it was cancelled) and our club's participation in the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. She's now serving as Conservation Chairperson and coordinating our club's efforts to support the local population of Purple Martins and Chimney Swifts. To recognize all her hard work for our club, Cheryl was given an original piece of artwork by Anna Stunkel that depicted a male and female Purple Martin sitting on the starling-proof entranceway to the type of gourd Cheryl has been championing. Besides being a hawk watcher at CVWO for four years, Anna is a talented wildlife artist. Anna has asked for permission to make copies of this painting that she would like to make available for \$25 with 50% benefitting our WBC Purple Martin Fund. Cheryl gave her permission and expressed her appreciation for the gift. She is looking forward to continuing to serve our club.

Field Trips – George Martin, Field Trip Coordinator:

Saturday, March 19: Machicomoco State Park, Hayes, VA, Gloucester County, led by Dave Youker. We'll meet him at 8am at the parking lot. Car-pooling at 7:15 will be available if requested.

Saturday, April 16: Newport News Park led by George Martin at 8 am.

Saturday, May 21: Cranston Mill Pond which is west of Lois Hornsby Middle School. This is private property to which Shirley Devan has obtained permission for our club's first trip there. Further info will be shared.

Bird Walks – Scott Hemler: Scott was absent. Nancy announced the following:

Saturday, March 26: Bird walk at Freedom Park as part of our commitment to hold a quarterly walk there. New Quarter Park is sponsoring a 5K race that day.

The Flyer: Nancy reported that editor, Mary Ellen Hodges, has set a deadline of March 27 for submissions for the next newsletter. She's pleased that she's had submissions from new members and is hoping for more.

Spring Bird Count: Nancy reported that the date set for this year's count is Sunday, May 15. More info will be coming from Jim Corliss, Bird Counts Chairperson. Nancy encouraged folks to participate either in the field or as a feeder watcher. Contact Jim if interested in joining a field team.

Programs:

Wednesday, April 20: Nancy reported that the presentation will be given by the 4 W&M grad students who'd received the 2021 research grants from us. They are as follows:

- Grace Phillips, "The Impact of Deer Overpopulation on Songbird Abundance, Diversity, and Health"
- Michael Academia, "Ospreys and Fish Shortages: Food Addition Study Increases Nesting Success in Mobjack Bay"
- Moira Meehan, "Using Science to Save Birds from Collisions: Can Sound Make Bird-safe Windows Even Safer?"
- Emma Noyelle, "Is Mercury Really a Widespread Problem for Songbirds: The Definitive Review"

Three of the students have requested to do their presentations remotely. This leads to the probability that the entire April meeting will be held via Zoom. To be determined by the Board soon.

Wednesday, May 25: Megan Thomas will give a presentation on Peregrine Falcons. The meeting will be held in-person at the library as well as on Zoom. It will not be the customary third Wednesday due to a schedule conflict at the library.

Refreshments: Nancy thanked Cathy Flanagan who is our Hospitality Chairperson and Cheryl Jacobson for the evenings refreshments to be served in the lobby outside the theater. Cathy passed a signup sheet for folks to volunteer for future refreshments

Nancy adjourned the meeting 7:15 pm.

Respectively submitted
Cathy Millar, Secretary Williamsburg Bird Club
March 24, 2022